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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 YAOUNDE 000480

SIPDIS

STATE PASS TO USAID
COMMERCE FOR ITA KAREN BURRESS

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TAGS: [KCOR](#) [PREL](#) [PGOV](#) [PHUM](#) [OSEC](#) [CM](#)
SUBJECT: CAMEROON'S JUSTICE MINISTER ON BIYA'S PLANS,
PRISONS AND ANTI-CORRUPTION ASSISTANCE

REF: A. DEPT OF JUSTICE WASHDC
[1](#)B. 31020Z APR 09
[1](#)C. YAONDE 275
[1](#)D. YAONDE 256

Classified By: Political Officer Tad Brown for Reasons 1.4 b and d.

[1](#)1. (C) Summary. Amadou Ali, Cameroon's Vice Prime Minister and Minister of Justice and one of the country's senior political leaders, professes he still does not know whether or not President Biya will run for reelection in 2011, but he insists Biya will step aside before another term expires, if not sooner, and pass power to a successor chosen by Biya, not in an open democratic process. Ambassador called on Minister of Justice and Vice Prime Minister Amadou Ali on May 18 to thank Ali for his swift action to address the Embassy's concern about Franck Abega, a Cameroonian who murdered a fellow student at the American School of Yaounde (ASOY) in 2005 and recently showed up at the school. End summary.

Ali's Responsive to US
Concerns About Abega

[1](#)2. (SBU) Ali told the Ambassador that he had ordered an investigation into the circumstances that allowed for the recent escape of Franck Abega from Jamot Hospital ("three prison guards were assigned to watch him that day; none of them were present") and a review of Abega's case. (Note: Abega was immediately apprehended outside ASOY school and brought back to Jamot Hospital. The incident shook up the school community and has been the subject of several Embassy demarches, reported more septel. End note.) Ali said he also ordered a review of Abega's case. Ali said he was unconvinced that Abega was unfit to stand trial and predicted, "at least we can put him in prison." Ali mentioned that Abega's father, renowned Cameroonian football star Theophile Abega, had accosted a prison guard over the weekend of May 15 and raised the possibility that he, too, would be charged. The Ambassador thanked Ali for the Government of Cameroon's (GRC) commitment to ensuring the security of ASOY staff and premises.

Prisons: Nothing to Hide;
Working to Improve Conditions

[1](#)3. (U) The Ambassador thanked Ali for having granted permission, on less than one week's notice, for the Embassy Political Specialist to visit three separate prisons (septel). Ali insisted that he had "nothing to hide" and welcomed such visits, which he hoped would confirm that the Government of Cameroon is making a concerted effort to improve prison conditions. "We know the funds for food are insufficient," he admitted, "but we are arguing to increase

the budget" and would welcome any charities willing to operate in the prisons. Ali said the death penalty remains legal in Cameroon, but hasn't been carried out in many years because Biya continues to commute sentences to life imprisonment. Ali said it was important to leave the death penalty on the books as a deterrent to serious crime.

Anti-Corruption Cooperation

¶4. (U) Ali welcomed the USG's invitation to bring Cameroonian officials to participate in a conference on corruption in Tanzania in June (ref a) and said the GRC would identify which officials would be best placed to participate.

Biya Might Run in 2011 But Will Step Down Soon

¶5. (C) As in previous meetings (ref b and c), Ali spoke at length about Biya and post-Biya scenarios. Ali said Biya has a bitterness ("amertume") towards "the youth" (meaning anyone under 70) because of his experience with former ministers like Abah Abah (Finance), Oluanguena (Health) and Mebara (Presidency and Foreign Affairs), all of whom are a generation younger than Biya and Ali and now incarcerated and facing charges of corruption. Ali said he was still not certain that Biya would run in 2011, but was categorical in his assertion that Biya would step aside before finishing his next mandate if he did run. Ali said he was certain Biya would carefully orchestrate his succession to ensure stability and national unity. Ali admitted he did not know

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how Biya would manage his succession, but clearly did not believe Biya's successor would be chosen in an open democratic process. Ali predicted Biya would choose someone from the next generation ("between 50 and 65 years old, which is young for the President") and boasted that Cameroon, unlike its neighbors, would not pass the presidency down through the family.

Priority on Economy and Finance Biya Chooses "West" Over China

¶6. (SBU) Ali said Biya's priorities are "economy and finance," saying the GRC was eager to benefit from the G20 assistance promised through the IMF (which Ali implied was appropriate, given that the G20 had caused the crisis). Ali said the crisis had noticeably affected Cameroon's finances, commenting "spending has been cut drastically and some investments will be deferred, but we will be okay as long as we can pay salaries." Ali said Biya prefers to interact with the West as opposed to China, whereas "Africans" are generally attracted by the swiftness of China's delivery on its assistance, bemoaning that "we wait for years while the West conducts study after study." Biya recognizes, Ali said, that China's assistance also comes with strings attached and has not bought in as others have.

Comment: If Ali Doesn't
Know, Who Does?

¶7. (C) Although Ali professes his fair share of cynicism about human rights and civil society, we continue to be impressed by his engagement in the pressing issues under his purview (prisons, the judiciary, prosecuting financial crimes) and his openness to us, even when discussing the GRC's most sensitive issues. His frequent unprompted musings about Biya and the presidential succession likely reflect the Cameroonian political class' increasing obsession with predicting and planning for the post-Biya era. Ali seemed supremely confident that Biya had a plan for his succession and that it would be a good one. Perhaps Ali knows more than

he lets on, but it is remarkable that someone with Ali's stature and experience with Biya would profess such little knowledge of Biya's plans.

GARVEY